**Dawson’s, Dresden, and Copyright**

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As many of you fellow fan scholars may be aware, the acceptances for the highlight of our calendar (Fan Studies Conference) have recently been sent out. This year’s conference is in Cardiff, and I am very excited to say I have been invited to present on my research. It made me wonder, how did I get to this stage? Given that we are going to the land of Torchwood and Dr Who, I decided to call up my very own TARDIS to travel through the seminal moments of my academic and fandom career.

Cue ‘wibbly wobbly’ time travel sequence.

The screen clears on the first set - a teenage girl’s bedroom in a suburb of London, styled in the late-90’s fashion of deep pile carpet and BSB posters on the wall. The girl (me) is excitedly watching Dawson’s Creek, a new TV show, on the new TV her parents bought her for her fifteenth birthday. I started watching DC (not to be confused with the other, comic book DC) in 1998 and fast developed opinions about the Joey/Dawson/Pacey love triangle. After quickly exhausting the possibilities of discussion amongst my high school friends, I found Dawson’s Desktop online, on my Windows 95 Gateway (remember them?) home computer and dial-up internet. Yes I’m showing my age! Dawson’s Desktop was an early fan engagement website set up in 1998. It amazed me that I could interact with the characters, read their diaries, and even post my ideas to other fans, giving me access to a limitless discussion group across the world. This was my first real experience of the interaction between fandom and commercial interests, and it just seemed right that I should be able to share my teenage hormone-and-angst filled fanfic stories and ideas with other fans. These stories varied in length and skill, but all had the same outcome - Joey ended up with Pacey (I leave it to your imagination how thrilled I was when \*spoiler alert\* they ended up together in the finale!). Over the course of those five years, in my real life I went from high school to college, and when Dawson’s finally went off the air I went off to university to study law. At that point, I thought my link with fandom was, like the posters on my bedroom wall, something I outgrew. However - life had other plans.

Let’s jump back into my TARDIS. Cue more wibbly-wobbly timey-wimey stuff and a fade into a small local pub in London in 2003. This was my second career defining moment - I met my very own Pacey Witter (reader - I married him!). As a dyslexic, he uses fanfiction in a completely different way to me. He uses it to improve his literacy skills - and to this day writes fanfiction based around the Dresden Files (by Jim Butcher). His passion reignited mine, and I took his self-published fanfic into my PhD interview to study copyright law, economics and fandom at the University of East Anglia in 2016. This has given me so many amazing academic opportunities to fully develop my passion for research in this area and leads to the the final defining moment I wish to mention, and that truly inspired me.

To experience it, come with me for a penultimate jump in my TARDIS. The scene opens on the auditorium at the University of Huddersfield in June last year for the absolute highlight of my academic career. I was extremely fortunate to hear many passionate and friendly people speak during that weekend, but the best moment was the keynote speech on fandom and activism given by Louisa Stein. Those that were there will remember the electric atmosphere, and the silence (and tears!) in the room at the end of her speech. My new academic aim is one day to present my research in such a powerful and inspiring way!

As we step back into the TARDIS for a final time to return to the present day, I bid you adieu with a final chat about my research. I am in the second year of a PhD working on my thesis ‘How ‘Fair’ is Self-Published Fanfiction?’. My research looks at self-published fanfic online and through licensed schemes such as Kindle Worlds, using large-scale qualitative analysis to investigate how these works interact with the underlying works. Do they harm the sales of the underlying work in any meaningful way? What about the market for authorised adaptations, which is becoming more important in a post-MCU era? This comparative project assesses whether the current intellectual property laws (namely copyright, trademarks and passing off) in the UK, EU and US create market failure, and if so, what changes could be recommended - for example whether a new fair dealing copyright exception under S30A Copyright Designs and Patents Act 1988 should be drafted to cover fanfiction.

In my thesis I compare the more developed approach of the US with that of the UK and EU to see whether current intellectual property laws in these locations succeed in their stated aims to promote creativity, or whether they misunderstand creativity in the current world of online fandom and creativity. Inspiration is obviously not strictly internal, arising in a vacuum. It relies on other external expressions to build upon. While copyright allows for some reuse, it may be drawn too narrowly in relation to certain types of work like fanfic that may actually benefit the work that it is based on.

This is interesting, topical research as there is very little case history on the subject in the UK and EU, and copyright law in these areas seems to presume fanfic is harmful and thus is an infringing copy or adaptation. However, in today’s age of user generated content much of the expansion of works such as fanfic on the internet rely on copyright exceptions such as fair dealing (UK/EU) and fair use (US). This is an exciting field of study and is currently being debated in the European Parliament as part of the new Proposed Directive on Copyright in the Digital Single Market.